

1970: The Golpe Borghese coup plot in Italy



A short history of the aborted neofascist Golpe Borghese coup plot in Italy, 1970, and the subsequent repercussions.

The Golpe Borghese was a failed Italian coup d'état allegedly planned for the night of 7 or 8 December, 1970. It was named after Junio Valerio Borghese, an Italian [World War II](#) commander of the notorious X MAS unit, the "Black Prince", convicted of war crimes, but still a hero in the eyes of many post-War Italian fascists. The coup attempt became publicly known when the left-wing journal "Paese Sera" ran the headline on the evening of March 18, 1971 : Subversive plan against the Republic: far-right plot discovered.

The secret operation was code-named 'Operation Tora Tora' after the Japanese attack on the US ships in Pearl Harbor which had led the United States to enter the Second World War on December 7, 1941. The plan of the coup in its final phase envisaged the involvement of US and NATO warships which were on alert in the Mediterranean.

The coup plot

This involved hundreds of neo-fascist militants, helped by 187 members of the Corpo Forestale dello Stato. The plan included the kidnapping of the Italian President Giuseppe Saragat, the murder of the head of the police Angelo Vicari, and the occupation of the Quirinale, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Defense and Italian public television broadcaster RAI. Certain Army dissidents also planned to occupy Sesto San Giovanni, at that time a workers' town and a stronghold of the Italian Communist Party. Apparently some militants briefly entered the Ministry of the Interior, but Borghese suspended the coup few hours before its final phase.

According to Borghese, the neo-fascists were actually gathering for a protest demonstration against the upcoming visit of president Tito of Yugoslavia, which was later postponed. This protest was supposedly called off because of heavy rain.[1]

Amos Spiazzi, commander of the Army dissidents, said that the coup was suspended because the Christian Democratic government knew of the coup plan and was ready to suppress the plotters and to declare martial law [2]

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When Borghese called off the coup late that night, the presumed plotters, reportedly unarmed, improvised a late spaghetti dinner before returning home. [3]

Several members of the National Front (Fronte Nazionale) were arrested and a warrant was served for Borghese. Borghese himself fled to Spain and died there in 1974.

Inquiry

On March 18, 1971, the leftist journal Paese Sera was published with the headline: Subversive plan against the Republic: far-right plot discovered. The first arrests concerning the coup attempt were made on the same day. The first people arrested on March 18 and 19

were Mario Rose, a retired army major and National Front secretary, Remo Orlandini, also a former army major, a real-estate proprietor and close associate of Borghese, and Sandro Saccucci, a young paratrooper. An arrest warrant for Borghese was also served, but he could not be found.[4] Later arrestees included

businessman Giovanni De Rosa and a retired Air Force colonel, Giuseppe Lo Vecchio.[5]

The investigation into the coup attempt was resurrected after Giulio Andreotti became defense minister again. Andreotti handed over a report by the secret service in September 1974 to the Rome public prosecutor, and shortly thereafter General Vito Miceli, a former head of SID, was brought for questioning before the investigating judge.[6] Miceli's interrogation led to his arrest two days later. [7] Miceli was then sacked, and the Italian intelligence agencies were reorganized by a 1977 law.

Trials

Three trials were started for conspiracy against the Italian state. In 1978, Vito Miceli was acquitted of trying to cover up a coup attempt, Saccucci, Orlandini, Rosa, and others were convicted of political conspiracy,[8] which also included Stefano Delle Chiaie, whose specific role is unclear. According to a 1987 UPI news cable, he had already fled Italy to Spain on July 25, 1970[9] However, according to other sources, including René Monzat (1992), he led the commando which occupied the premises of the Interior Minister.[10]

At the appeal trial in November 1984 all 46 defendants were acquitted because the "fact did not happen" ("il fatto non sussiste) and only existed in "a private meeting between four or five sixty-years-olds".[11][12] The Supreme Court confirmed the appeal judgment in March 1986.[13]

The final trial connected with the Golpe Borghese began in 1991, after it was discovered that evidence involving prominent persons (Licio Gelli, admiral Giovanni Torrisi...) had been destroyed by the Italian armed forces secret service before the first trial. Giulio Andreotti, minister of defense at the time the evidence was destroyed, declared in 1997 that names had been deleted so that the charges would be easier to understand. This last trial ended without convictions because the period of prescription for destruction of evidence[14] had passed.

According to the journalist René Monzat, investigations lasted seven years, during which it was alleged that the Golpe Borghese had benefitted from military accomplices, as well as from political support not only from Borghese's National Front or from MSI deputy Sandro Saccucci, but also from other

political personalities belonging to the Christian Democracy (DC) and to the PSDI (Italian Social-Democrat Party).[10] According to Monzat, investigations also discovered that the military attaché at the US embassy was tightly connected with the coup organizers[10] and that one of the main accused declared to the magistrate that US President Richard Nixon had followed the preparations for the coup, of which he was personally informed by two CIA officers.[10] These facts were confirmed through a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request by the Italian newspaper La Repubblica in December 2004. However, only a few marginalized sectors of the CIA were in

favour of the coup, while the main response was not to allow major changes in the geo-political balance in the Mediterranean.[11]

Involvement of the Mafia

According to several Mafia crown witnesses ("pentiti") such as Tommaso Buscetta, Borghese asked the Sicilian Mafia to support the neofascist coup. In 1970, when the Sicilian Mafia Commission was reconstituted, one of the first issues that had to be discussed was an offer by Borghese, who asked for support in return for pardons of convicted mafiosi like Vincenzo Rimi and Luciano Leggio. The mafiosi Giuseppe Calderone and Giuseppe Di Cristina visited Borghese in Rome. However, other mafiosi such as Gaetano Badalamenti opposed the plan, and the Mafia decided not to participate.[15]

According to Mafia boss Luciano Leggio, testifying at the Maxi Trial against the Mafia in the mid 1980s, Tommaso Buscetta and Salvatore Greco "Ciaschiteddu" were in favour of helping Borghese. The plan was for the Mafia to carry out a series of terrorist bombings and assassinations to provide the justification for a right-wing coup. Although Leggio's version differed from Buscetta's, the testimony confirmed that Borghese had requested assistance by the Mafia.[16]

According to the pentito Francesco Di Carlo, journalist Mauro De Mauro was killed because he had learned that Borghese – one of De Mauro's childhood friends – was planning the coup.[17][18][19]

Footnotes

1. ^ Prince's Lawyers Deny Charge, The New York Times, March 22, 1971
2. ^ Maurizio Dianese e Gianfranco Bettin, La strage. Piazza Fontana. Verità e

memoria, Feltrinelli, 2002, pp.165-169 (ISBN 880781515X) 3. ^ Italian Police Track Leftist Terrorists, The New York Times, March 29, 1971

4. ^ "Rome Police Arrest Another in Alleged Neo-Fascist Plot". The New York Times. 1971-03-21. pp. 29.

5. ^ "Colonel Arrested on Rome Plotting Charge". The Times. 1971-03-24. pp. 6.

6. ^ "General to Tell of Coup Attempt". The Times. 1974-10-29. pp. 8.

7. ^ "General Who Led Intelligence Agency Arrested in Italy". The New York Times. 1974-11-01. pp. 5.

8. ^ "Jail Terms for 1970 Italian Coup Plotters". The Times. 1978-07-15. pp. 3.

9. ^ "Neo-fascist held in isolation to await questioning". United Press International. 1987-04-01.

10. ^ a b c d René Monzat, Enquêtes sur la droite extrême, Le Monde-éditions, 1992, p.84

11. ^ a b (Italian) Il golpe Borghese. Storia di un'inchiesta, Rai Educational 12. ^ (Italian) E la Cia disse: sì al golpe Borghese ma soltanto con Andreotti premier, La Repubblica, December 5, 2005

13. ^ (Italian) Il golpe Borghese: La vicenda giudiziaria Misteri d'Italia website

14. ^ Il golpe Borghese

15. ^ Stille, Excellent Cadavers, p. 151-53

16. ^ Stille, Excellent Cadavers, p. 186

17. ^ (Italian) "De Mauro venne ucciso perché sapeva del golpe", La Repubblica, January 26, 2001

18. ^ (Italian) De Mauro ucciso per uno scoop: scoprì il patto tra boss e golpisti, La Repubblica, June 18, 2005

19. ^ Revealed: how story of Mafia plot to launch coup cost reporter his life, The Independent on Sunday, June 19, 2005

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